JOHN REYNOLDS, "THE OLD RANGER" OF ILLINOIS, 1788-1865

BY

JOSEPHINE LOUISE HARPER

B.A., Rockford College, 1942
A.M., University of Illinois, 1943

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN HISTORY
IN THE GRADUATE COLLEGE OF THE
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R. UNIV. BIBLIOTHEEK LEIDEN

JOHN REYNOLDS,
"THE OLD RANGER" OF ILLINOIS,
1788-1865

Mention of the name of John Reynolds to Illinois citizens in the middle of the twentieth century usually evokes no sign of recognition. Yet a century ago, he was widely known as one of the most picturesque political figures in the state. Born February 26, 1788, in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, he was the eldest child of Robert Reynolds and Margaret Moore Reynolds, Protestant immigrants to the United States from Ireland in 1785. When John was a few months old, his parents moved to the vicinity of Knoxville, Tennessee. In later life, John vividly recalled "the knocks . . . which the plowhandles gave me among the stumps, stones and roots" of the Tennessee farm. There, too, he gained his first distrust of the Indians. By 1800, Robert Reynolds had "caught the mania" for moving westward. The family, which now included six children, made the difficult journey across unsettled wilderness toward Spanish territory beyond the Mississippi. Because of his dislike of Catholicism, and because of the entreaties of Pierre Menard and others, Robert Reynolds was prevailed upon to remain in American territory. He settled first near Kaskaskia, and later moved to Goshen in Madison County. Quickly he rose to a position of relative importance as a judge, but corrupt land speculations, overindulgence in liquor, and political intrigues brought a rapid downfall, a course which his eldest son never forgot. In both Tennessee and Illinois, young John was given all the meager educational opportunities available. Through the kindness of an uncle, he returned to Tennessee in 1809 to attend an academy operated by Isaac Anderson, a Presbyterian minister. Two years later, Reynolds began the study of law in the office of John McCampbell in Knoxville.

He was still engaged in his legal studies when war with England was declared in 1812. Stirred by the anti-British sentiments of his parents, by suspicions of the Indians, and by

the sight of patriotic demonstrations in Tennessee, he returned to Illinois for military service on the frontier. As a member of the Illinois territorial forces, as a United States Ranger, and as judge advocate, Reynolds's military exploits were not outstanding, but from them he later received his famed sobriquet of "the Old Ranger," a title to which he clung proudly.

During the War, Reynolds had been admitted to the Illinois bar, but not until 1814 did he begin to practice. Because he catered to "the class of mankind whose pecuniary circumstances will not admit of feeing a lawyer," his law business brought him friends but no financial rewards. In common with men of many professions, however, he engaged in profitable land speculations between 1814 and 1819 as a partner of Joseph A. Beaird. Profits from this business enabled Reynolds to enter other ventures: a partnership in dry goods stores with his brother, Thomas, and a ferry and tavern project at Illinoistown with William A. Beaird. Moderate prosperity seems to have attended his activities, for he was able to offer a substantial reward of fifty dollars for the return of a runaway slave in 1816. In the following year, he married Catherine Dubuque LaCroix Manegle, daughter of Julian Dubuque, well known Canadian Indian trader. By this marriage he assumed obligations to support not only his wife but three small children whom Mrs. Reynolds brought from her two previous marriages.

Prior to 1818, Reynolds had been only slightly interested in politics and "had no 'itching palm' for office." Nevertheless, through his military service, law practice, and business associations, he had become acquainted with the territorial political leaders—including Ninian Edwards, Jesse B. Thomas, Nathaniel Pope, Elias Kent Kane — and his ambitions began to turn towards the political arena. After being thwarted by Judge Thomas in his desire to be a delegate to the Illinois constitutional convention in 1818, Reynolds went to Kaskaskia to see the opening of the First General Assembly held in the new state. To his surprise, he was chosen by the legislature to be an associate justice of the Illinois supreme court for a

term which was to last until a new legislative election of justices in 1824.

Reynolds dutifully attended the sessions of the supreme court throughout his term. From the fourteen opinions credited to him, it may be inferred that he took an active part in the deliberations, although the decisions of the court in this period were brief and had little lasting significance. As provided by law, he served also as a circuit court judge. The early proceedings on his circuit were sometimes marked by rustic informality, but he made few serious errors. In allowing continuance of a case against William B. Whiteside and Robert Sinclair on charges of burglary, he incurred the wrath of political opponents. In hearing a case against Governor Edward Coles, he may have allowed political aspirations and proslavery convictions to influence his rulings on the admission of evidence.

With the other justices and the governor, Reynolds was a member of the council of revision, and hence took an active interest in legislation. In this capacity, in 1821, he wisely but unsuccessfully opposed the establishment of the State Bank, which was founded solely upon the credit of the state.

The most serious criticism against Judge Reynolds and other justices is that they meddled in politics while in the judiciary, although in view of the limited term of service and the necessity of legislative election this activity was understandable. A satellite of Ninian Edwards for several years, Reynolds was among the possible candidates for governor in 1821. In the following year he was supported by the Edwards faction as their candidate for United States Senator, but was defeated by the incumbent, Jesse B. Thomas. Soon afterwards Reynolds broke his alliance with Edwards, perhaps partly because of dissatisfaction over his defeat, and partly because of difference of opinion over the issue of calling a convention to amend the state constitution to permit slavery. Reynolds was numbered among the proslavery convention men, and was a candidate for the general assembly in 1824, but on both points

he and his faction were among the vanquished.

In December, 1824, when the supreme court was reorganized, Reynolds was not reelected. Because he had curtailed his land speculations after 1818, need of money was uppermost in his mind, and he began to look about for another political office. In spite of threatening, "I will not promise but I thing I will shut my eyes on elections," he probably had no sincere intention of doing so. In vain he besieged Illinois congressmen to aid him in securing a land office or some other federal appointment. "I do not like to pass for *nothing* in a land where I have been raised — " Thus he complained to Daniel P. Cook. Still in opposition to the Edwards faction, Reynolds successfully waged and won campaigns for election to the Illinois house of representatives in the summer of 1826 and again in 1828.

In the Fifth and Sixth General Assemblies, Reynolds favored bills and resolutions which he believed were popular with the majority of western voters, such as proposals to graduate the price of public lands, and internal improvements. He served on the committee which joined the supreme court justices in making a needed revision of state laws. The accomplishment of which he was most proud, however, was his sponsorship of the movement to replace outmoded forms of punishments with a penitentiary system. Under his leadership the laws were altered, and Alton was selected as the site of the new institution. Of less credit to him was his shortsighted advocacy of the policy of selling the school and seminary lands of the state and of permitting the loan of the proceeds to the state to defray current state expenses.

Between 1825 and 1829, hints of national parties were appearing among the old cliques. Reynolds followed a cautious course. He voted in the legislature in 1826 for a resolution recommending Jackson for the next presidency, but he took no part in the county meetings and stump speeches arranged by the ardent Jackson men before the election of 1828. His success in the general assembly encouraged Reynolds to try

again for a higher political office. Early in 1829, he decided to be a candidate for governor in the election in August, 1830. Confidently he wrote to a friend in Louisiana: " . . . I am out for Governor. I think my case is sure. The common people say I am their man." As a legislator, Reynolds had not gained wealth, but through revival of his land business he had managed to keep his family in comfort while he achieved a measure of personal popularity.

After Reynolds's attempts to bargain with the extreme Jackson party, led by William Kinney, had failed, Reynolds and Kinney both became candidates for the governorship. In a campaign notable for its length and for the tireless exertions of the rival candidates and their partisans, Reynolds was victorious. Both he and Kinney utilized all the means of winning favor for themselves or casting aspersions on their opponents that could be devised: personal campaign speeches, newspapers, handbills, dispensation of free liquor, and trickery. Professing to be a Jacksonian, Reynolds purposely said little about national issues, for he hoped to gain Whig votes. By approving Governor Edwards's theory of state ownership of public lands, Reynolds secured a valuable alliance with his former enemy, who brought both votes and funds to the Reynolds party. Although better educated than many of his contemporaries, Reynolds carefully hid his "book larnin'" from the frontier voters. Yet, he dressed in fashionable well-fitting suits, not in the coonskin cap and hunting garb of the ordinary frontiersman. Tall, erect in bearing, and possessing pleasing facial features, he was not unimpressive in appearance, but by the adoption of the title of "the Old Ranger," by emphasis upon the fact that he "was born poor, and raised obscurely," he was identified as "the People's candidate." This independent and cautious strategy and the methods used to popularize his views Reynolds found to be a satisfactory combination. He used the same tactics repeatedly throughout his later political career, even after the emergence of national parties and strict party regularity made them antiquated and ineffective.

During his term as chief executive of Illinois from December, 1830, to November, 1834, Reynolds introduced into his civil administration few policies not already conceived by one or more of the three men who had held this state office before him. With the exception of his Indian policy, he adhered to his concept of the office as one of supervision rather than one of leadership. In spite of differences with the senate in 1830-1831 over some of his nominations, he was able to secure an administration friendly to him by making second choices and by delaying some appointments until after the legislature had adjourned.

Governor Reynolds supervised the completion of the penitentiary, and pardoned the first convict sentenced to it. Continuing his support of internal improvements, he solicited the cooperation of Indiana to better the navigation of the Wabash River, a valuable internal improvement project which was never completed. He also took an active interest in the proposed Illinois and Michigan canal, and in spite of his claim to being a Jacksonian, he hoped for additional federal aid to the project. Upon receiving an engineer's report that conditions of water supply and elevation were unfavorable for a canal, he advocated the building of a railroad instead. Because the Black Hawk War and state financial troubles interrupted further planning, the problem was left for his successors to handle.

In an attempt to clarify the disputed boundary between Illinois and Michigan Territory, the Governor enlisted the aid of a federal surveyor, Lucius Lyon, to work with the Illinois surveyor, John Messinger. Although the controversy was not settled by the survey, Reynolds's actions did the Illinois claim no harm and may have strengthened it.

Although he continued to advocate establishment of a public school system in the state, no progress was made. On the contrary, the state continued to sell seminary lands and to borrow the school and seminary funds for payment of current expenses.

The use of school funds was a symptom of the tangled financial situation of the state. Expenditures were larger than normal state income, which therefore had to be supplemented by loans from the funds intended for education and for improvement of the Wabash River. Much of the blame for this course rested not upon the Governor, but upon the legislators, who were unwilling to risk their popularity by providing for increased taxation. The most important single financial problem was the closing of the business of the State Bank. Many of the notes of the Bank, circulating at values below par, were "floating through the atmosphere of Illinois . . . as a poisoning and pestilential vapor that withered and blighted the country . . . . " As they were due to be redeemed in the summer of 1831, the general assembly authorized a loan of one hundred thousand dollars, which Reynolds negotiated with Samuel Wiggins, a Cincinnati capitalist, in spite of the claim of irate tax payers that such a large sum could never be paid. As a result of these factors, the state had a debt in excess of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars at the conclusion of Reynolds's administration. The Governor himself had been zealous in attempting to obtain additional state revenue through the discovery and development of new saline lands, but he was unable to foresee the forthcoming decline of salt manufacturing in Illinois which eventually nullified his efforts.

Trouble with the Indians in northern Illinois, which culminated in the Black Hawk War, had been brewing for a number of years prior to 1830. Although the Sauk and Foxes had in theory relinquished their claims by treaties of 1804 and 1816, they had been allowed to continue to use their former lands. The British band, led by Black Hawk, wished to continue to do so in spite of a steady flow of white settlers into the region in the late 1820's.

Governor Reynolds came into office desirous of seeing the Indians removed from the state. In his own words, ". . . it is difficult to find good reason for the expulsion of the Indians from their own country. But, with, or without reason, the

Indian must emigrate, leaving Illinois . . . for the peaceable occupation of the white man." Unverified reports of depredations by Black Hawk's band arrived at his office frequently. After requesting in vain a law to give the governor discretionary power to call out the militia against the Indians, Reynolds began to act on his own initiative in the spring of 1831. Before consulting federal authorities, he issued a call for seven hundred mounted militiamen to assemble on June 10. In spite of the disapproval of William Clark, superintendent of Indian affairs at St. Louis, and of General Edmund P. Gaines, commander of the western division of the army, Reynolds proceeded with his military preparations. He was gratified when Gaines had a change of mind and requested the use of the militia, for this decision, Reynolds wrote, "put my whole proceeding on a legal and constitutional footing, and the responsibility of the war removed from me to the United States." Because Black Hawk submitted without battle or bloodshed, the campaign was concluded quickly, and the Sauk leader promised not to recross the Mississippi without permission in the future.

Instead of removing the cause of disturbance, as Reynolds confidently believed, the military movement of 1831 seems to have aroused more dissension between other Indians and whites throughout the state, until the Governor was forced to express disapproval of violence by any party. Moreover, Black Hawk, ill-advised and dissatisfied with the land west of the Mississippi, decided to return once more to the old home of the band. On April 6, 1832, his entire band of five or six hundred men with their women, children, and possessions, crossed the Mississippi and entered Illinois. Panic spread through the northern settlements, and on April 16, Reynolds issued a call for volunteers: "I did this on my own responsibility, as I had not received any requisition from General [Henry] Atkinson, who commanded the regular forces at Rock Island." Anticipating that other tribes would join the Sauk and Foxes in war, Atkinson willingly received the state troops, but the campaign progressed badly because of shortages of

supplies, difficulties of communication, and the lack of military training of the militia. Many of the volunteers became disgruntled with army life, and to Reynolds's consternation, they were heard to blame him for their hardships. Accompanying the troops, Reynolds issued the order permitting Major Isaiah Stillman and his restless company to reconnoitre the Indians. This resulted in a suprise skirmish which became a rout for the white soldiers and an encouraging victory for the Sauk and Foxes. Unintentionally, Reynolds's decision precipitated a lengthy and expensive campaign.

Discontent among the Illinois troops increased until it was "with deep feelings of mortification" that Reynolds concluded that they would have to be discharged from service at the end of May. Three hundred men, including Abraham Lincoln, heeded his plea to reenlist for twenty days until the new levies could be organized in June, but military operations were virtually at a standstill during this interim. The fresh troops and the regulars then pursued the Sauk and Foxes into Michigan Territory (Wisconsin), but the soldiers' movements were hampered by lack of supplies, unfamiliarity with the region, and differences of opinion on strategy between Reynolds and General Atkinson, who was officially in command of the troops. Fearing that this campaign would result disastrously for him not only in a military sense, but also in a political way in the forthcoming state election in August, Governor Reynolds returned to his home in Belleville, Illinois, in July, and missed the final defeats of Black Hawk.

With General Winfield Scott, the Governor negotiated the treaties with the Sauk and Foxes, and with the Winnebago, which effected their permanent departure from the state. Complaints of Indian aggressions continued for a time after 1832, but the federal government urged restraint upon Reynolds, members of other tribes, the Potawatomi, Ottawa, and Chippewa, were gradually settled westward also, and the Indian problem became one of rapidly declining importance in the latter part of Reynolds's term. After some controversy, the Governor and his staff, which had included many personal

and political friends, were recognized as officers in federal service and recompensed accordingly. As a major general, Reynolds received about $1700 for his service in 1832.

In taking a prominent part in the Black Hawk War, Reynolds narrowly missed losing political favor, but the timely and successful end of the conflict enabled him to add even more luster to his title of "the Old Ranger." Looking ahead to the expiration of his governorship and being "young, ardent, and ambitious," he desired promotion to a seat in Congress instead of a second term as governor. In the first congressional district in 1834, Reynolds was opposed by Adam W. Snyder, Edward Humphreys, and Charles Slade, the incumbent, all of whom claimed to be under the Jackson banner. As in 1830, Reynolds pursued a moderate course. Although he was unsuccessful in efforts to have a history of the Black Hawk War written and published during the campaign, he had little difficulty in capitalizing upon his part in the conflict by means of newspapers and circulars. Slade died during the summer, but with the opposition still divided between Snyder and Humphreys, Reynolds emerged victorious.

A special election was held in November to fill the unexpired portion of Slade's term in the Twenty-third Congress. After ascertaining that he would not antagonize any of his political allies, Reynolds entered and won this race also. Two weeks before his term would have expired, he resigned as governor to go to Washington. His departure was saddened by the death of his wife, a bereavement which he declared was "the severest shock I ever experienced." Governor Reynolds had been a conscientious administrator. If his term of office was not marked by many accomplishments, neither was it tainted by scandal or corruption. In his background, in his distrust of the Indians, in his understanding of the minds of the populace, and in his political methods, he exemplified a successful, and in many respects typical, governor of a young state or frontier territory of that period.

Reynolds's journey to Washington was his first travel out-

side of Illinois since his youth, and he was greatly impressed by the macadamized roads, railroads, and large city edifices found in the East. Part of his trip was enlivened by association with the renowned frontiersman, David Crockett, then a Representative from Tennessee, whom Reynolds found to be notable for his "inexhaustible store of humor and mirth" and "his benevolence and kindness of heart."

Entering Congress confident of becoming a leader, Reynolds learned by experience that other members were more talented than he. Serving as Representative from 1834 to 1837, and from 1839 to 1843, he was, however, faithful in attending to the varied duties of his position. His speeches were noted for his " quaint expressions and delivery," although one was described by John Quincy Adams as "two hours of vulgar, coarse, and silly buffoonery." Although he professed to be a Jackson Democrat, he avoided party disputes whenever possible. As he wrote in 1835: "I keep as far as I can out of the vortex of President making. It is a deep water, in which I try not to enter." Consequently, he was often accused of being "on pea ridge," the current Illinois phrase to denote political indecision.

In Congress, Reynolds did not always conform to the dominant policies of the Jackson and Van Buren administrations because sectional interests of the West sometimes appeared contrary to the majority party line. Because the specie circular was unpopular among western speculators and small bankers, Reynolds delayed his approval of it until the flurry of opposition had subsided, although on other later financial measures he supported the Van Buren policies openly. On the question of internal improvements, Reynolds remained among the minority of Democrats who favored this type of federal aid. On the issue of a protective tariff, which he had advocated in 1834, he reversed his stand, and by 1840 he was allied with the majority of his party who were in favor of free trade. In his own estimation, one of the most satisfying measures which he helped to pass was the general preemption law of 1841 for the benefit of prospective settlers.

Outside of his ordinary tasks, Reynolds had other experiences, most unusual of which was his association with the Mormon leader, Joseph Smith, during the winter of 1839-1840. The Mormons were just moving to Illinois, and because of the importance of their numbers, they were being courted by Illinois politicians. When Smith came to Washington, Reynolds introduced him to President Van Buren. The combination of politician and prophet seems to have been a strange one, but Reynolds shrewdly or tolerantly listened to the Mormons, with whose religion he did not agree, but whose honesty and devotion to their cause he admired.

In the summer of 1836, Congressman Reynolds was married to Sarah E. Wilson, member of a Southern family, whom he had met in Washington. Perhaps partly because of her preference for life there to that in Illinois, and partly because of his own untiring ambition, Reynolds sought reelection to Congress several times, although he spoke longingly of his home in Illinois: " . . . my strong feelings for the West makes the time hang heavy on me, until I leave for the valley of the Missisippi [*sic*], where I have resided for forty years."

Out of Congress between 1837 and 1839, Reynolds dabbled in business and state affairs. He practiced law with Lyman Trumbull, toyed with the idea of engaging in land speculation in Wisconsin Territory, and enlisted the interest of several of his Belleville friends in construction of a short railroad from a coal tract on the Mississippi bluffs to Illinoistown. In this enterprise, none of the investors had had previous experience with railroads, but in spite of underestimated costs, the refusals of contractors to carry out their agreements, and the physical difficulty of bridging a shallow lake, the railroad with wooden rails and horsedrawn cars was completed in December, 1837, to be "the first railroad built in the Mississippi Valley." The financial strain upon the partners, however, was too great. At a personal loss to Reynolds of fifteen to eighteen thousand dollars, the road was sold in the following year before he could see its completion with iron rails and steam locomotives. Even so, the venture was a

courageous achievement.

The winter of 1838-1839, Reynolds spent in Vandalia, where he and Stephen A. Douglas were reported to "drill the party, get up caucuses, regulate balls, and make Judges." Reynolds's availability and his long friendship with Governor Thomas Carlin brought him an appointment as a special financial commissioner to sell bonds to obtain money for the construction of the costly Illinois and Michigan canal and for the completion of a new State House in Springfield. Reynolds probably acted to the best of his limited ability and experience in fiscal matters, but the provisions of the loans which he and his fellow commissioners arranged in New York, Philadelphia, and London eventually proved unsatisfactory to the state, although the immediate proceeds enabled the work on the canal to continue for a time. A loan which Reynolds arranged in behalf of the State House was not carried out, and the Whig press made him the scapegoat for all the unfavorable financial transactions.

Reynolds did not profit in a monetary way from the appointment as fund commissioner, although the state paid "all but two hundred dollars" of his expenses. Nevertheless, the position brought him a trip to England, France, and Belgium. After seeing many interesting and unusual sights, he returned home proud of the development of the United States and willing to say, "There are some things to admire in Europe, and much more to condemn." Foreign travel he recommended "to endear the government of the Union more to its citizens, and make them know the very important position the United States hold over human destiny."

In the decade from 1835 to 1844, Reynolds participated in five political contests in which he was candidate for Representative. He was also mentioned as the possible Democratic nominee for governor in 1837, 1838, and 1842, but he made little effort to secure the office, for, in the words of Snyder, Reynolds "would prefer being in Congress much to being Governor."

Snyder in the congressional campaign of 1836 was Reynolds's most formidable opponent. Detained in Washington during the summer, "the Old Ranger" made no speaking tour through the district. To his astonishment and chagrin, Snyder was victorious by 111 votes. "Reynolds is completely chop fallen. he dies remarkably hard. is scarcely ever out of his house. his wit and broad storys [*sic*] seem to have forsaken him. he looks bad." Thus wrote the victor a few days after the election.

In succeeding campaigns Reynolds resorted to the old effective methods of public addresses, handbills, and newspapers. With a united Democratic party behind him in 1838, he won a triumphant majority. In 1841, the first year that the convention system was used in the district, he had little trouble gaining the nomination. In spite of some rumblings of discontent in party ranks, unity was preserved, and he won easily again. Nevertheless, the Democratic party was becoming "thoroughly organized and disciplined." The old era of loose personal factions masquerading under party names was coming to an end, and less interest was accorded to old frontier leaders and ideas. Reynolds was apparently unable to adjust his tactics to meet these changes. He lost the congressional nomination in the district convention in 1843. In the following year, his maneuvers were also in vain. Hurling charges of convention frauds, he dared to defy the party regulars to run independently as "a candidate . . . in the old fashioned manner," but he was unequivocably repudiated by the voters. Not only did his rebellion fail to win him a seat in Congress, but he had irretrievably forfeited his position of party leadership in Illinois.

After 1843, Reynolds spent most of his remaining years in Belleville. There for brief periods he edited the *Eagle* in 1853-1854, and the *Star of Egypt* in 1858. Frequently he organized and spoke at public meetings to advocate American expansion into Texas, Oregon, and Cuba, to celebrate the victories of the Mexican War, to praise the Compromise of 1850, and to popularize improvements in transportation in

St. Clair County. With the latter enterprises — a macadamized toll road to St. Louis, plank roads, and projected railroads — he was usually financially associated.

Because of his interest in these projects, he was elected to the house of representatives in the general assembly in 1846 and again in 1852, for it was hoped that his influence and past legislative experience would be of use in securing favorable charters. In 1847, he sponsored the incorporation of the St. Clair County Turnpike Company, which constructed the first macadamized road in Illinois. It proved a welcome improvement to travelers between Belleville and St. Louis, and the tolls brought profit to the incorporators, including Reynolds. His efforts between 1852 and 1854 to place Belleville on the route of proposed railroad lines across the state met with no success, however, but he was honored for his long years of public service by being elected speaker of the house.

After 1854, Reynolds followed a troubled and independent political course. Although he had voted to send Douglas to the Senate in 1846 and 1854, and had approved resolutions in the legislature in favor of Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska bill, Reynolds was soon alarmed by the vociferous opposition to the measure. He turned against Douglas and denounced the bill "as wrong, uncalled for, and contrary to the wishes of the American people." Because of his proslavery views, he could not accept the new Republican party which developed out of the anti-Nebraska forces, but he claimed to be "an old line Democrat," who upheld principles from which Douglas and others had departed. After hailing the nomination of Buchanan in 1856 as "*the best thing* visited on the United States for the last twenty years," Reynolds followed the lead of the President in 1858, when Buchanan and Douglas split on the question of Kansas and its Lecompton constitution. When the National or Buchanan Democrats selected a separate slate of state candidates in Illinois, Reynolds became their nominee for superintendent of public instruction, although he himself never entertained any hope of election. He saw that the choice of Senator was clearly between Lincoln and Douglas. So great

was Reynolds's desire to defeat "the little giant," that he virtually ignored the National Democratic candidate, Sidney Breese, and in his *Star of Egypt* advocated the election of Lincoln as the best choice of two evils.

In 1860, the Buchanan faction chose Reynolds to be an Illinois delegate to the Charleston convention, but the rival Douglas men obtained the contested Illinois seats. In the ensuing division of the Democratic party, Reynolds supported John C. Breckinridge. Formerly opposed to the idea of secession, Reynolds came to the conclusion that the South had no alternative but to leave the Union after the election of Lincoln and the Republicans, who in Reynolds's mind were all abolitionists. In sympathy "heart and soul, with the South," Reynolds praised the first peaceful weeks of secession as "the greatest demonstration of human greatness and grandeur that was ever performed on the globe." The Civil War with its bloodshed and suffering disheartened him, however, and by 1862 he began to long for a return of the South to the Union although he was still opposed to the abolition of slavery. One of many Copperheads, Reynolds was not attacked individually by the Republicans until after he wrote a letter commending the Democratic Illinois legislature in 1863. Soon afterwards, letters he had written in favor of secession to Jefferson Davis and other Southerners in 1860 and 1861 were found, and the aging Reynolds became the target of bitter and highly vituperative accusations of treason by the Republican press of Springfield and Belleville. Upon hearing of the assassination of Lincoln, he expressed regret of the deed to his Democratic correspondent, Lyman C. Draper, but the shadow of the charge of disloyalty hung over Reynolds until his own death from pneumonia on May 8, 1865.

Following his retirement from Congress, Reynolds found pleasure and also a degree of fame in the composition of several books and pamphlets on varied subjects and in the writing of articles for newspapers and periodicals. Two historical volumes, *The Pioneer History of Illinois . . .* (1852) and *My Own Times, Embracing Also the History of My Life*

(1855), brought him a reputation as a fair Illinois scholar. Both were reissued after his death, and were of influence until superseded by secondary works of more accurate balanced research by trained historians in the twentieth century. Of the two books, the *Pioneer History* is of less interest because of its overcondensation of events from 1673 to 1818, and because Reynolds was dealing mainly with periods of which he had no personal experience. At his best in descriptions of men, events, and manners of which he had personal recollection, Reynolds in *My Own Times* left a volume worthy of reading for study of the social, political, and cultural history of Illinois from 1800 to 1855, although it suffered from faults common to many autobiographies: lack of perspective in regard to the author's career, omission of facts distasteful to him, and inaccuracies of memory.

Reynolds did not limit his writing to history. *The Life and Adventures of John Kelly* (1853) was a romance, often comic, which Reynolds used as a framework on which to attach an unappreciated series of lectures he had prepared on politics, on morals, on his deistic religious beliefs, and on scientific theories of planetary formation and evolution. *Sketches of the Country, on the Northern Route from Belleville, Illinois, to the City of New York . . .* (1854) recorded in pleasant manner a vacation trip he and his wife had taken to see the Crystal Palace. *The School Advocate. An Essay on the Human Mind and Its Education* (1857) expressed his firm belief in popular education as a necessity in a democracy. *Friendship's Offering. A Sketch of the Life of Dr. John Mason Peck* (1858) was a kindly tribute to the memory of an old and valued friend, but was in no sense a biography. *"The Balm of Gilead." An Inquiry into the Right of American Slavery* (July, 1860) was a logical concise summary of all the varied arguments which Reynolds could muster up in support of slavery. Addressed to northern readers, it was published too late in the rising discord to have appreciable influence. The last of Reynolds's books and pamphlets was *Moral Principles Enforced and Politics Discussed,* a slender sequel to

John Kelly. In it he defended the secession of the South, but advocated a return to the Union. His contributions to magazines and newspapers were mainly historical or autobiographical in nature, although some expressed his current interests in education, religion, and science.

Most of Reynolds's major works were printed on his own hand press by young or itinerant printers whom he hired Typographical errors abound in them, for proofreading was carelessly done as neither the printers nor "the Old Ranger" seemed to find the task a congenial one. With the exception of his histories, his books were not widely circulated, and proved evanescent in their attraction. Copies disappeared until the few that remain are considered rare and valuable. Although he was not usually original or creative in his thinking, and was often biased or uncritical in forming his opinions, his publications indicated that he was remarkably well-informed on a wide variety of subjects. In spite of their faults, Reynolds's writings, when viewed against his background of education and experience, constituted a unique and interesting addition to Illinois literature.

Reynolds's death removed from the Illinois scene a fascinating person. A curious product of the frontier, he had combined the appearance of a statesman with the wily opportunism of the politician, interest in scholarship with public pretense of ignorance. Although his career had been inextricably woven into the fabric of Illinois history of the nineteenth century, several factors combined to allow his name to sink into undeserved oblivion as a political figure. By neither of his marriages did he have any children; his wife, Sarah, died in July, 1865, and other members of his family within a few years moved away from Illinois. Moreover, he had not outlived Republican distrust of his attitude toward the Civil War, which in the minds of many overshadowed his earlier prominence. Because he left no body of papers and because manuscript material concerning him was widely scattered, it was easy for later writers, among whom were numbered old political opponents or their descendents, to

dismiss him into obscurity. Yet few men in Illinois have been so successful in acquiring high offices of the state bestowed by popular vote as was "the Old Ranger."

A Note On Sources

For a biography of John Reynolds, his own writings are of significance for the view they give of his intellectual interests and attitudes, as well as for information on the events of his life as he saw them. Although a colorful and highly valuable account, his autobiography and major work, *My Own Times,* is incomplete and not always accurate.

Contemporary newspapers of Illinois contain a wealth of information, ranging from vital statistics to records of political campaigns and of business activities of "the Old Ranger," much of which is not found in other sources. Of particular value are the *Illinois Intelligencer,* 1818-1832, the *Sangamo Journal (Illinois State Journal)* after 1830, the *Illinois State Register* after 1836, and the Belleville *Advocate* and other Belleville journals after 1840. Some aspects of his legal and business enterprises may be found in deeds, licenses, and other records filed in county archives, particularly those of St. Clair County. For Reynolds's career in Illinois political offices and for his terms in Congress, there are useful published government documents.

Manuscripts, however, are perhaps the most valuable source, for in his letters Reynolds often revealed himself more openly than in public print. His relationship with his contemporary political associates may be found in the papers of Ninian Edwards, Daniel P. Cook, Elias Kent Kane, and Joseph Gillespie (all in the Chicago Historical Society), in those of Henry Eddy (transcripts in the Illinois Historical Survey), those of Adam W. Snyder and his son, John Francis Snyder (Illinois State Historical Library), and those of Reynolds's onetime law partner, Lyman Trumbull (Library of Congress).

For the period of Reynolds's governorship, the extensive Black Hawk War Manuscripts (Illinois State Historical Library) and the varied records collected in the Illinois State Archives are most useful. His correspondence with Lyman C. Draper (Wisconsin State Historical Society) is of considerable importance for an understanding of his political and literary activities during the last twelve years of his life. Other manuscripts in the repositories already mentioned and a few letters scattered in the Henry E. Huntington Library, Missouri Historical Society (St. Louis), and McKendree College Library have also furnished needed details for the narration of the life of John Reynolds, "the Old Ranger."

VITA

Josephine Louise Harper was born on May 22, 1920, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. There she received her college preparatory education at Northrop Collegiate School, from which she received a diploma in June, 1938. The following four years she attended Rockford College in Rockford, Illinois. She was graduated from that institution with the degree of Bachelor of Arts, with Honors in History, in June, 1942. Granted a graduate scholarship at the University of Illinois for the year 1942-1943, she received the Master of Arts degree in August, 1943. Holding fellowships in history during the years 1943-1944 and 1945-1946, she continued her graduate study at the University of Illinois. Her professional experience has included a semester of teaching and library supervision at Washington Community High School in Washington, Illinois, from September, 1944, until February, 1945, teaching assistantships in history at the University of Illinois during the spring and summer terms in 1945, and historical research for Dr. F. S. Siebert, director of the School of Journalism, during the year 1946-1947. Since January, 1948, she has been Manuscript Librarian, in charge of the department of manuscripts, maps, and pictures, at the Library of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin at Madison. She is a member of Phi Kappa Phi.